



# Mental Health in Rural Iowa

By Michael R. Rosmann Ph.D.  
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- Behavioral healthcare is more comprehensive and holistic; it includes “talk” therapies, psychiatric services, addictions treatments, and any interventions that impact our behavior, such as pastoral counseling, life coaching, wellness programs, and consultations with many experts.
- The term “mental health” is stigmatizing and outdated in most settings; mental healthcare requires medications and psychotherapy, whereas behavioral healthcare is understandable, acceptable, and places the client in charge of managing thoughts and actions (i.e., behaviors).
- Behavioral health is the preferred term of most U.S. government agencies and ever more professional training programs.

## **Why Use Behavioral Instead of Mental Health**

- Relationship problems, such as partner and marital problems, domestic and child abuse, quarreling with elders, blame and anger are usually the first symptoms, about 40% of diagnoses.
- Adjustment problems, which are temporary exacerbations of anxiety, depression and other behavior problems that remit when stress diminishes, about 24% of diagnoses.

## **Most Common Diagnosed Behavioral Health Problems of Farm People\***

**\* Rosmann & Delworth, 1993; Rosmann & Stucker, 2008.**



- Anxiety disorders, including excessive worry, panic, PTSD, 11% of diagnoses.
- Forms of depression, with major depression 3 times more common than bipolar depression, 18-33% of diagnoses.
- Substance misuse, either alcohol, street drugs or prescribed medications, 7%, but co-occurring about 40% of the time with other problems.
- Personality disorders (1.5%) and psychotic disorders (<1%).

## **Most Common Diagnoses of Farm People cont.**

- Agriculture-related fatalities due to physical injuries and illnesses have declined since federal legislation created agricultural safety and health centers in the early 1990s, but not suicide by farmers.
- The suicide rate of farmers is much greater than the average for all occupational groups, said the CDC in July 2016.
- 84.5 per 100,000 farm workers took their lives in 2012, which is higher than construction (2<sup>nd</sup> at 53.3) and retired military veterans (35.3), as indicated in a July 13, 2016 article in Newsweek Magazine.

## **Facts About Agriculture-Related Fatalities:**

- The July 2016 report by the CDC examined data from 17 states only and did not carefully define the population on which their report was based
- The CDC acknowledged their errors; now we await their clarifications
- The CDC based their conclusion on farm workers and did not include farm owners and operators, foresters, fishers & others

## **CDC Retracts Report about Farmer Suicide**

- There are consistent data from many sources that indicate a higher rate of suicide by the agricultural population
- The USDA definition of farmer best defines Iowa's farm population, that is, farmers, ranchers, farm workers, migrant farm laborers, fishers, and foresters
- In Iowa, rural residents, most of whom are farm people, or live in small towns that often are agriculturally-based, have a higher rate of suicide than urban and suburban residents

## **What Can We Believe about Farmer Suicide Rates**



- The number of psychiatrists, social workers, psychologists, and counselors in the Rural Midwest per 100,000 persons is 40% that of urban areas.
- This places a heavier burden on medical providers (doctors, PAs, nurse practitioners) and requires us to work with them to serve behavioral health needs.
- There is a growing cadre of young behavioral health professionals in rural areas and who want to work with the agricultural population

## **The Need for Behavioral Health Professionals in Rural Area**

- Acceptable (culturally attuned) services suited to client needs
- Accessible and available when needed
- Affordable

## How to get A+++ in Rural Behavioral Health Delivery

- We must know something about what they are expecting
- We are more like educators and coaches than therapists
- It's often beneficial to see them at their home or neutral settings for extended periods
- Telehealth can assist

**For Farmers, Credibility is Important**

- AgriSafe Clinic Network, which operates agricultural health clinics in 26 locations throughout Iowa ([www.agrisafe.org](http://www.agrisafe.org))
- County, regional and Iowa State University Extension Service offices
- Iowa Concern Hotline: 1-800-447-1985
- Rural Assistance Center ([www.raconline.org](http://www.raconline.org)) or Ph.: 1-800-789-2647
- 2-page articles in Iowa Farmer Today; conduct online search with the words "Farm and Ranch Life Rosmann"

## **Other Resources for Serving Farm and Rural People**